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17 June 1953

The demonstrations, riots, and disorders which took place in East Berlin on 16 and 17 June have widespread implications for Germany and for the future of Soviet foreign policy. If reports from the West press are even half true the developments are without precedent in Soviet - satellite relations and their importance can not be over estimated.

It appears that the disorders originated in a demonstration by construction workers protesting a recent ten percent increase in work norms. It seems probable that the original demonstration was engineered by the East German authorities to demonstrate their willingness to comply with the will of the workers by readjusting the norm downward. Such a ^{move} ~~word~~ is compatible with the new "soft" line for East Germany. This assumption is supported by the fact that the East German communist party issued a lengthy carefully worded communique, complying with the demands, only three hours after the demonstration began.

As nearly as can be determined from the confused, and probably exaggerated press reports, the synthetic "groundswell" quickly got out of control and developed into a genuine demonstration against the East German regime, for free elections, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and a unified free Germany. It appears that the demonstrations subsided on the evening of the 16th into heated street corner discussions.

On the 17th, the disorders apparently resumed with mobs converging on the East German government buildings in the Leipziger Strasse. According to the West press, East German police were unable to cope with the demonstrations and Soviet infantry and armored troops were called in. Some reports claim that Soviet troops fired on the demonstrators.

Although the scope of the demonstrations can not be determined pending the arrival of more reliable reports, the following conclusions seem at least partially justified by available evidence:

1. The entire new Soviet peace campaign is placed in an extremely precarious position -- the Soviets must either ruthlessly suppress the demonstrators, destroying the facade of the new soft policy, or run the risk of expanding disorders not only in East Germany, but possibly in the European satellites, notably Poland and Czechoslovakia;
2. The East German regime will be seriously weakened vis-avis the Soviets and the East Germans;


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3. In West Germany the rioting will probably evoke a strong urge of national solidarity with the East German people and by so doing give impetus to demands for progress toward unification. This effect can obviously be modified, by the Soviet handling of the dissidents, and
4. Those responsible for the original demonstration badly overestimated the efficiency of the security apparatus in East Berlin and underestimated the resistance potential of the East Berliner. It is possible that the responsibility for and repercussions of this error will stretch beyond the East German government or party and into the Soviet party and government and may, in fact, be related to the suspected dichotomy within the leadership of the CPSU.

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